

/4 cont./

562
197 At the present time the family concept of the woman is changing because of the conduct of mestizo and even pure Indian women brought about by changes in their economic situation and by contact with whites. Gradually, the traditional organization of the marriage payment and fidelity based on the payment is being broken down, because it is the women themselves and not their relatives who receive the payment, and for their activities as prostitutes. The phenomenon is noted not only in the centers of the interior which have contacts with whites and Negroes -- principally traders and civil authorities -- but also and especially in Maracaibo and some of the towns in the department of Magdalena, to which they have been obliged to emigrate. However, they maintain the family concept of mutual assistance and share their income with their close relatives, not as before in the form of the marriage payment but as income earned in the sex market.

843 Prenatal care and birth. A woman learns that she is pregnant when she feels a loss of appetite and repugnance for food. The later disappearance of the menstrual period confirms the suspicion, and she immediately sees to it that her husband is informed of the event, so that he may know of his coming fatherhood. Also, in the case where she has had extramarital relations in the absence of the husband, the woman, when she feels these early symptoms of pregnancy, goes in search of him, cohabits with him, and later can tell him of her condition, thus avoiding possible later suspicions. From the time of the ending of the first menstrual period, she begins to count the months, and she expects delivery after the eighth month.

837 Before the arrival of a child, the woman complies with established rules intended to avoid a lengthy and difficult delivery as well as to safeguard the new arrival from sickness which would affect his normal mental and physical well-being. Included in these prescriptions are to be found some of useful and practical value and others with a marked magic aspect. These magic observances generally affect both parents, although some only refer to the woman, /5/ others exclusively to the man (1).

643 /5 cont./

1. Pineda Giraldo, Roberto.

Aspectos de la magia en la Guajira

/Aspects of Magic in La Guajira/,

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Bogotá, 1950.

943
734 For example, the mother must not eat food that has been tasted by an animal, for if she does her child will develop stomach trouble and will perform its natural functions in the manner of that animal; neither the man nor the woman should watch a snake in its hole nor should the man kill it, because if he does the mother's labor will be long and difficult. The mother-to-be should never attend a primary or secondary burial nor the man dig a grave, as this also may bring on a long and difficult delivery in addition to the child's suffering serious illness, etc.

843 During the period of pregnancy, the husband avoids irritating his wife and satisfies her wishes or desires, because otherwise his child may be born, for example, with a marked expression of anxiety on his face. However much she should contradict him, he should not make use of his authority or beat her, in deference to her condition and also because such conduct would bring grave consequence, for should the wife lose her child through ill-treatment, the responsibility would fall on him and his assets, and he would have to make payment to his wife in compensation for the injury caused. However, there are Guajiro who beat their wives when they are with child, when they know them to be of such low social standing that their relatives will not have sufficient power to assert their rights.

The Guajiro believes that certain actions which influence the psyche of the pregnant woman will have a physical repercussion on the coming infant. This is one of the reasons why the husband takes care to safeguard his wife and please her, avoiding causing her annoyance, scolding her, or ill-treating her. However, among these beliefs there are some which serve to solve satisfactorily certain problems which may arise from the breaking

/5 cont./

843 of social norms. In La Guajira, for example, adultery is at present very commonly practiced with whites and Negroes, and so to explain the appearance of children of a different color or of features distinct from Indian ones, the Guajiro woman appeals to the following belief: If a pregnant woman should receive a shock due to the sudden appearance of some person, her child will be born the color of that person.

We have already seen that if during her pregnancy a mother experiences an intense desire to possess some object and is not able to find it and satisfy her wish, the child will be born with the anxious facial expression of the mother and later will cry continually for no apparent reason. In these beliefs the Indian also sees the explanation of the birth of twins and of abnormal children. By the same token, the husband's duty is to prevent such impressions on the /6/ future mother, because a strong feeling of fear during the first months of pregnancy may cause her to have twins, or the impression made on her by an animal or by a physically defective person may cause her to give birth to an abnormal child. This imposes an obligation on the man when on the road to walk ahead in order to warn his wife of the presence of any such phenomena, so that she may avoid seeing them.

Another set of precautions are observed by the woman to prevent her delivery being long and painful. Among these we may name the following:

During her pregnancy she makes use of a special kind of herb which is found wild on the banks of streams and in the mountains, grinding it carefully to make a soft paste with which, from the fifth month onward until her delivery, she massages her stomach every day at dawn, leaving the juice of the herb on her skin throughout the day. When she wishes to make the treatment more effective, she applies the paste from the third month. The infant whose mother has undergone this treatment is born normal but is so reduced in size and weight that he resembles a fetus of four months. Thus the delivery is extremely easy and rapid. Infants who have been subjected to this kind of prenatal treatment are not born sickly or with nervous defects.

/6 cont./

843 They are normal although extremely small and undernourished. As the months pass, such an infant gradually recovers from the prenatal treatment and toward the end of the third year reaches normal size and acquires the usual physical characteristics of a child of ordinary type.

[262] The Guajiro mother does not like to adopt this treatment, but she will make use of it when in previous cases she has had a difficult delivery. She is proud of the large size and robustness of her children, and it is a cause of pleasure to her when they are admired. It is more usual for her to employ another group of practices, dietetic ones, such as those which advise abstaining from eating cheese, butter at meals, or fat meat, adding milk to corn mazamorra, and drinking large quantities of water daily before eating, during the entire pregnancy, in order to prevent the too active growth of the fetus and to have, as a result, a less difficult delivery.

The practices we have been describing are also recommended to keep the woman from developing to an exaggerated size which would hinder her movements both in carrying out her domestic duties and in the long distances she has to walk.

843 During the final months of pregnancy, she abstains from sexual relations, both by her own wish and that of her husband, 784 in the belief that /7/ they would cause the child to be born [634] sickly and the delivery to be prolonged, possibilities which are their main concern and the avoidance of which justifies the practice of any treatment that prevents them. Also, during the final months of her pregnancy, the woman is prohibited, within practical limits, from lifting heavy things, carrying water from wells and loads of seeds, carting firewood, or loading burros. But only women of outstanding economic position who have female bond servants and slaves to carry out such chores are able to observe these precautions. It is not rare, therefore, to find that the Guajiro woman is obliged to do her daily work to the detriment of her condition, for after one of these exertions, a woman is liable to suffer an immediate miscarriage.

/7 cont./

843 Sometimes a woman who knows that her delivery is likely
278 to be difficult takes various herbs, which she buys from the women of the Sierra de Jarara, who understand their curative properties, or gets someone to obtain them from the Arhuaco /Cagaba/ Indians, to whom they frequently go in search of medical remedies.

844 At the time that labor pains begin, the woman takes in-
278 fusions of various herbs which her relatives have previously obtained. With these the delivery progresses rapidly, and the birth occurs quickly and successfully. Also during delivery she takes one or more doses of the juice of the herb which serves to reduce the size of the fetus.

842 Once the child is born and in case the placenta is delayed,
278 the woman drinks the juice from the pulp of a pumpkin (*Crescecia Cujeta*) and that of a new /nueva/ herb with the purpose, once the delivery has occurred, of preventing an early recurrence of pregnancy once sexual life is renewed. This has the property of preventing conception for a period up to four years when taken in larger than normal dosage.

844 If the herbal remedies do not produce the hoped-for result, the woman's relatives with her assistance recapitulate the taboos that were possibly violated during the months of pregnancy by her, by her husband, or by both, and they endeavor to make some sort of reparation. Thus, for example, if she had seen a snake in its hole or if her husband had killed it, or if she had looked fixedly at it and had not complied with the precept to step over it to arrest its baleful influence, as is their belief, her relatives go in search of a snake of the same species, which they kill and bring to place on the abdomen of the woman in labor, after which the delivery is successfully accomplished. Should they find that the husband was hunting with firearms or had simply fired a gun, they proceed to wash /8/ the barrel of the firearm in question and give this water to the woman to drink. With this the delivery is quickly completed.

/108 cont. /

842 language the urá-hu-chon ("place where babies are formed").
[826] But in order to be fruitful the woman must menstruate at regular intervals. Otherwise they will be sterile, and in La Guajira cases of this are known.

They explain the necessity of menstruation for fecundation by saying that after a woman has had her monthly period, in spite of bathing her body and her exterior genital organs most carefully, there remains in the interior of the womb a small quantity of menstrual blood, the last of that period; and when the sexual act occurs, the male sperm mixing with the female blood will form the new being, who from the first moment shows all the characteristics of an adult in miniature /109/ but needs a period of residence in the maternal womb to be nourished and to develop properly. When this moment arrives, birth takes place. They do not know what causes the difference in sex. They think, furthermore, that the female blood beside being a contribution to the initial formation of the new being is also its food, because they have observed the disappearance of the menstrual cycle during pregnancy.

Consequently, for the loss of blood the mother suffers during her pregnancy (nourishment of the fetus) and during the birth, her relatives claim compensation payment from the husband; they demand two payments in this connection which we have already described in a special section of this chapter.

Now we can understand why the payment made in such circumstances cannot be touched or made use of by the woman when it is a payment of animals, because, as we have said, it would mean that she was figuratively consuming herself, as it represents her lost blood, part of her very life.

843 The woman during pregnancy acquires certain magic properties and she finds it necessary to observe a large number of taboos in order to carry to a happy fulfillment the gestation which is taking place. She herself is considered a being of potential and dangerous magic for weak and sick people, whom she must not visit because she will instill a feeling of sorrow and sickness in them, and this could cause them to have a relapse or lead to their death.

[29 cont.]

*756 When the woman becomes pregnant, the spirit puts up with
833 the situation without getting angry, but it does not show any such
834 patience if she delays a length of time in the sexual act with her
husband, or if she sleeps by his side throughout the night.

The female shaman's obligation, in the sexual aspect, goes
to the length of forcing her to be but a passive entity during
coitus, not permitting her body the slightest motion and also not
permitting any endearments from her husband before the sexual
[787] act. When these dispositions are disobeyed, the shaman finds
herself suffering during the night from especially terrifying and
horrible dreams which fill her with fears and anxieties.

*756 The man who marries a shaman gets to understand his
693 wife's situation, and for this reason he is prudent in his actions:
He does not demand anything but the strictly indispensable, and
he is in accord with her in all matters related to her special
state. [30]

*756 But in spite of all these prohibitions, the female shaman
776 who becomes pregnant receives aid from the spirit at the time
844 of giving birth. This assistance consists of an easy delivery of
her baby and of counsel her spirit gives her on the simplest form
of giving birth, the remedies she should take, etc.

*756 The shaman must not perform ceremonial acts of curing
841 when she is in her menstrual period because the patient will be-
843 come worse instead of improving. However, pregnancy does
not present any obstacle to her activities, and she may accom-
plish cures during the entire period of gestation.

*756 In the case of a male shaman, the spirit permits him to be
834 with his wife, but for a very short time; he is also allowed, as
[595] are the rest of the Guajiro, to have several wives.

In summary, women shamans must cohabit exclusively
with their husbands, avoiding all endearments, movements, the
prolongation of coitus, and pregnancy. They may not exercise
their functions during their menstrual periods. The male shaman
also must be moderate in the sexual aspect and limit himself to
his wife, or wives, as the case may be.

*756 The food taboo is limited to prohibiting the shaman from
262 eating the flesh of such animals as he has received in payment

[41 cont.]

764 1. The first of these types refers to the custom established
782 among them of sacrificing, during the wake of any member of
the community, a number of animals belonging to the dead man
(cows, bulls, goats, sheep), the meat of which is divided among
those attending the wake along with the corresponding drink,
which in these days is rum but in times past was chicha.

[767] The reason given for the sacrificing of animals during a
wake in answer to the question is that this is done in deference to
the guests and especially to those whom we could call "profes-
sional mourners," who spend all day and all night moaning over
the corpse. But on observing certain practices and particularly
certain taboos regarding the meat of these sacrificed animals,
one has to think rather of the ritual character of the sacrifice.

262 It is a fact that the relatives — sons, daughters, nephews
764 [and nieces, sabrinós], brothers [and sisters, hermanos] etc. —
783 of the deceased cannot eat the meat of animals sacrificed during
782 the wake or during the later ceremony of secondary burial, as this,
according to their belief, would be equivalent to eating their
dead kinsman's flesh. This taboo, imposed on the deceased's
relatives, serves to prove to us — so far as it is possible to de-
duce — the ritual aspect of the sacrifice of the dead man's
livestock, stock which on being slaughtered takes on the same
untouchable or magical quality, which the individual takes
on when he disappears from the world of the living and enters
the universe of the dead. [42] To put this more plainly, the
animals sacrificed are contaminated by their dead owner.

[765] The untouchable quality of the animal sacrificed at the
wake or in the ceremony that accompanies the second burial
is supported by the following fact. The belief exists in La
[843 Guajira that if during pregnancy the mother or the father of the
753] future child is present at the exhuming of a corpse, the child
is born sickly, suffers from permanent diarrhea and night sweats,
755 and gets more and more pale and progressively thinner. Its
765 illness continues to get worse, and none of the familiar remedies
have the desired effect. The parents then resort to the follow-
ing system of curing (a system which with some variations is
also common among the people of the town of Santander).
They wait until there is an exhumation ceremony, and then

[57 cont.]

W
854
291 a wooly substance from another tree which is very similar to the
balso. So dressed, the infant Indian, lifted onto the bare
shoulders of its mother or clinging to her knees, appears in
reality very like a small monkey. With only this savage dress,
these Indians are quite happy." ... (40)

40. Anon. Op. cit., 2d, I, 37.

W
854 The missionary is right when he compares these children
to small monkeys. The idea of dressing the child in so peculiar
a costume is not just to protect him from the vagaries of the
climate, or to dress him with greater or lesser aesthetic taste,
but to safeguard him from evil spirits by means of this disguise,
which constitutes a veritable transformation of his physical per-
sonality. The child on being dressed up in this extraordinary
covering is really changed into another being, so that the evils
he might attract to himself lose their effectiveness since the
spirits are deceived by the substitution that has been made.

G
755 A method of curing very similar to that we have just
described is the one used when a newborn child shows signs of
intestinal trouble and diarrhea, evacuating something like
spittle. The woman who is acting as diviner discovers by her
art that the sickness attacking the infant is due to its mother
[753] having allowed a duck to eat part of her food. For this reason
the child passes its fecal matter in a way similar to that of a duck.
How does one proceed, then, to restore the infant to health?
The feathers around the anus of the duck are plucked out,
burned, and the ashes are reduced to powder. As soon as the
infant's bowels have moved, his mother must clean him care-
fully and then apply the powder of the ashes of the feathers
around his anal sphincter. If the diviner's diagnosis has been
correct, the child should recover quickly on the application of
the prescribed remedy. [58]

G
● [843] If during her pregnancy the mother should eat fruit which
753 has been previously pecked at by any kind of bird, the child
755 on being born will have stomach trouble and his excrement will
be similar to that of the bird. The Indian women who are

[58 cont.]

755 expert in these sicknesses and who devote themselves to applying the remedies and divining the causes of such illnesses indicate by what bird the fruit which the mother ate was contaminated. Once the origin of the sickness has been determined, they proceed to carry out the method of cure which entails hunting and capturing the bird responsible, which, once killed, is roasted, and the meat fed to the child. A sancocho [stew] is also prepared, using portions of the bird, a good part of which is fed to the child. With this medicine the infant should be quickly cured. If this does not effect a cure, the divination has been incorrectly made, and it was not that kind of bird that pecked at the fruit eaten by the mother during her pregnancy. The whole process must therefore be done over again to discover with absolute certainty what animal caused the child's sickness.

● 843 If a pregnant woman should eat the meat of a hen that has
753 been killed by a sparrow hawk, the child will be born sickly, his excretions will be green, and his crying will be like the cry of a hawk. When they do not know the origin of the sickness, they
755 apply home remedies or those of any local curer [curandero]. If
[757] these do not bring about the desired effect, then they must turn to divination. The diviner will decide that the mother ate the flesh of a chicken that had been killed by a sparrow hawk. The curing method will follow a similar process to that previously noted: a hawk is found and killed; a leg of the creature is taken, and the bone is well cleaned and allowed to dry. When it is sufficiently dry it is boiled, and the child's body bathed with the resulting infusion.

262 The meat of such a hen — contaminated by the hawk
825 which had eaten some of it — is also harmful to children in
842 general, boys and girls, and also adults. Every time it is eaten
888 it causes sterility. For this reason the magic taboo on this meat is lifted only for the old and the very aged who have already lost their procreative powers and in consequence have nothing to fear in this respect.

756 Household medicine. This system of medicine, which, as we have said, is independent of shamans and diviners, is based above all on the practice of certain magic practices directly

[58 cont.]

755 associated with some prohibitions of a taboo nature or with established social customs, the origin and in part even significance of which is unknown. But what attracts our attention in this aspect of Guajiro medical [59] practice is preventative rather than curative nature. To demonstrate this, we quote some examples:

753 During the period of pregnancy, neither the father nor the
755 mother should be present at the exhumation of the dead, a cere-
843 mony which the Indians hold to comply with the rites of the
secondary burial. If this injunction is disobeyed, the infant
about to be born will, at birth or a few days later, have a sickly
appearance and will be afflicted with constant diarrhea and
night sweats, and will be characterized by a very pronounced
paleness and extreme thinness.

755 If this occurs, if through carelessness the parents witness
the exhumation of a corpse during the mother's pregnancy and
her child is born sickly, they will not try to blame the child's
illness on any other cause than that just stated. In accordance
with this decision, they will proceed to apply the curing method
appropriate for such an emergency, which, as we noted in the
previous chapter, "Magic and Sacrifice," is as follows: (a) They
wait until there is a fiesta of a ceremonial nature for the ex-
humation of human remains and then place the infant inside the
recently opened body of the animal that has been sacrificed for
the ceremony. (b) If the infant cannot be taken to the place
where the ceremony is being held, a bone of the sacrificed ani-
mal is taken, left to dry, and cooked, and the infant is bathed
in this water. (c) If there is no possibility of a ceremony of the
type described being held in the near future, a hole is made in
the sand, and the child is buried therein up to its neck and is then
covered with the loose earth.

843 Neither should the husband of a pregnant woman under any
845 circumstances dig a grave or assist in the construction of a vault
764 (an element of acculturation) destined for the primary or second-
[77] ary burial of any person. If he does his wife will suffer the con-
sequences of this disrespect in her delivery, which will not be
normal: prolonged for several days, very painful, and with seri-
ous consequences for the mother and for the coming child.

[59 cont.]

● 843 A pregnant woman should never be present at or watch a
845 burial, for if she does so, she will have a difficult childbirth:
the infant's arrival will be delayed in a manner both painful
and difficult for the mother.

755 Anyone who may have touched the corpse of a person
758 whose death has not been natural — who has been murdered,
764 for example — is prohibited from approaching the side of one
who is sick, because this individual will die because of his
presence. This prohibition is also extended to those who have
directly assisted in the exhumation of human remains. Further-
more, both of these persons are strictly forbidden to come near
[753] children [60] or places where they may be, because their pres-
ence, contaminated by the nature of the dead, will cause the
children to fall ill.

843 Serpents also have magic influence on pregnant women.
845 In this case it is not an influence destined to injure the unborn
child but is directed against the mother herself, who feels in
various ways in her own flesh the malignant action of the
reptile. For instance, if a woman during her term of pregnancy
sees a hunting snake [culebra cazadora] and remains looking at
it for some time, her child will be born stupid. The explana-
tion that the Indians give for this very generally accepted belief
is that as this snake gives the impression of being stupid, be-
cause it does not attack people as other snakes do and does
them no harm but confines itself to hunting young birds for food,
it transmits this quality to the infant. A mother who encounters
such a reptile should pretend not to have seen it and automati-
cally look elsewhere.

825 If during this same period the mother-to-be should see
843 any kind of snake (other than a hunting snake) she will suffer a
845 miscarriage or some kind of painful mishap related to the de-
livery. To avoid these possible ills, the woman should try to
step over the snake. If in spite of this difficulties in childbirth
occur, then they resort to a curing method which consists in
finding a similar snake, killing it, opening it up carefully, and
localizing in the interior of its intestines the water that it has
drunk, collecting this and taking it to the sick woman, so that
after she has drunk it, her labor will be hastened and will then
occur without any serious complications.

[60 cont.]

845 If in this same condition the woman sees a serpent under
843 a stone or in a hole, her delivery will be delayed, and it will be
845 difficult and long. As in the case immediately preceding this,
prevention depends on the indifference shown by the woman
toward the snake: She should immediately look away from the
creature. But the coincidence of seeing a snake and its being
in a hole or under a stone brings about a new complication,
since two elements are involved: first, the snake as such as we
have seen in the previous accounts; and second, its apparently
difficult position, which is transmitted to the woman in the mo-
ment of childbirth in the form of delay in the birth and the
physical difficulty of its accomplishment.

Also, the childbirth will be delayed several days and will
be extremely painful if during her pregnancy the woman's hus-
band commits the imprudence of killing a snake of any kind.

[61] The snake then, as we noted at the beginning and
843 as we have been able to confirm by means of the examples sub-
845 mitted, exercises a special magic influence on pregnant women.

[538] The position of the snake when seen, either directly by the
woman or by the husband, makes this influence greater. We
also heard from a story told to us that another belief exists re-
lated to the snake and women's pregnancy. We cannot say
whether it really exists or if it is the product of imagination and
legend because the two elements seem to be mixed up. It con-
cerns a certain serpent that attacks people by jumping at them
from a tree and forcing its tail into their ears, and the fact that
it only attacks women at a certain period of their pregnancy or a
pregnant woman's husband at the same period.

According to the story related to us, during the first three
months of pregnancy the woman may be attacked by a very
exceptional male serpent with three colors: green, black, and
white, placed dorsally in the form of an X. (The female of the
species, according to the story, has only one color: green.) The
male serpent attacks the wife during the early months of preg-
nancy, as well as her husband. The creature is usually found
hidden in the branches of trees which shade paths and can spring
like an arrow from its place of ambush, attacking people with
great accuracy. With a spring it settles on its victim's head,

[61 cont.]

825 twining itself around it, and with its tail, which is very thin, it
843 pierces his ear. The pressure is so great that generally the tip
of its tail comes out of the other ear, which causes the death
of the person attacked. The method of defense does not invoke
magic as in other cases but is limited to the simple precaution
[75] taken by the woman of going about with a pañuelo [kerchief] on
her head which covers her ears. Hence the serpent winds itself
around the head but is unable to introduce its tail into the ear
of the victim. The woman, on reaching home or on meeting
someone, will be able to take revenge on the snake and kill it.
But the snake also takes its own precautions, according to the
story, as, if the husband and wife walk together, it will not
attack for fear that the man will kill it.

Up to this point the story is no more than an interesting
legend, the fruit of the primitive's imagination, but for the
study we are interested in the latter part of the story, which
runs as follows, has great value. If the same serpent on the
other hand sees a woman when her pregnancy is advanced
(after the fourth month), the woman seems to have an evil
influence on the snake, which appears to suffer from paralysis
and becomes helpless, lying on the [62] ground unable to spring
into the trees. There in that condition it can be easily killed.
If it is not dispatched at this moment, the snake recovers its
strength and agility as soon as the woman goes away.

Once again we see the magic interaction of serpent
and pregnant woman. But there is this difference between the
magic action of the other animals which makes its influence
felt through the mother upon the child to be born, and that of
the serpent which discharges all its magic power directly on the
mother, provoking in her pains and delays at birth, abortions,
etc. We would ask why?

We have up to this point collected a series of facts which
quite clearly show the magic-participatory action of animals
in the lives of the Guajiro natives and above all in what refers
to the explanation for the presence of sickness. Furthermore,
the action of the snake is related to one of the most interesting
phenomena in the life cycle, childbirth, which includes the

[62 cont.]

825 whole period of pregnancy. The duality of childbirth-serpent
843 is brought to our notice with an insistence and disconcerting
realism which we will endeavor to explain.

596 If we look into the Guajiro family organization we can
621 see how that community taken as a homogeneous whole is
divided into series of extended family groups which follow the
line of maternal filiation. Belonging to a family group are the
mother, the sons and daughters of the mother, the sons and
daughters of the mother's daughters, and so on successively. The
administration of the family is not in the hands of the father,
who is not considered as such, but in those of the maternal
uncles, the eldest of these being predominant. Inheritance also
428 is determined by this system, and sons inherit nothing from their
natural father, but from their mother or their maternal uncles.
The property of the father is split up among his nephews, sons
of his sister, whom he considers as sons. Patrilocality and
591 matrilocality exist, the former predominating. The family
group, wrongly named by some authors casta is very much
614 extended, and to it belong all those bearing the same surname.
Each large family group has its own property mark or brand and
a representative animal. Thus, for example: [63]

Family groups

Representative animals

Uriána (41)

jaguar

[104]

41. For the convenience of our readers
we have adapted the phonetics of all
these Guajiro names to Spanish or-
thography, using the most apparent sounds.

Uráriyú

rattlesnake

Uriyú

snake

Wóúriyú

partridge

Uyárayú

cauquero (a species of
deer)

Ípwana

cari-cari

Sápwana

bittern

[64 cont.]

In the case of the Uyárayú group, we find another perfect correspondence between the name of the animal and that of the family group:

<u>uyára</u>	= cauquero (a species of deer)
<u>yú</u>	= from <u>wayú</u> Indian, people
<u>uyárayú</u>	= people of the <u>cauquero</u>

The foregoing demonstrates the existence within the Guajiro community of the remains of an ancient clan organization, matrilineal and totemic. We say remains because the significance of the totem, as we have noted, has almost completely disappeared, since there does not exist a fixed prohibition against killing certain animals (in this case the animal corresponding to the group) nor any ceremonial ritual related to it. We do not wish to enlarge on this subject of the existence of totems in La Guajira as this will be treated in a later thesis.

We only wish to emphasize the value of the serpent in Guajiro magic for which no [65] clearer explanation can be found than the connection it maintains with the ancient beliefs related to the totem. It shows us that the greater percentage of Guajiro totemic clans are connected in their name to this creature; also that the serpent's evil effects fall directly on pregnant women, causing harm not to the children, as occurs with other animals (the fox, sparrow hawk, duck...), but directly to the mother.

. . .

The mother-to-be should also avoid seeing a sparrow hawk because if she disobeys this ruling her child will be born bleary eyed, since they say this bird is.

A pregnant woman's husband must not go hunting with a modern weapon — the rifle — since he can do this with the traditional weapons, the bow and arrow, for if he does not obey this rule, his wife's labor will be prolonged for a long time, and no remedies nor any other attempts to help her will hasten the birth in any way. When a husband has failed to obey this magico-preventative medicinal norm, it is necessary to obtain a rifle — preferably the one the husband used in his hunting —

[65 cont.]

- 843 and very carefully wash it [in water]. Giving the woman this
845 water to drink will permit her to deliver the child immediately.

751 If a Guajiro father has to set off on a long journey on
854 horseback, leaving behind his newborn son, he must comply
492 with another custom of a magic nature, which requires him to
wrap the cinch of his horse about the child for a few minutes.
If he fails to do this, the child will be very ill and complain
pitifully during the time his father is absent. An equivalent form
under the same circumstances is the father's customarily placing
his foot on the newborn baby's chest for a brief moment. If
this obligation is not complied with, either through forgetfulness
or all will on the part of the father, the mother, or some close
relative of the child, must find the father's old sandals and
place them on the child's chest for a few moments in order to
obtain the effect desired, which the ritual action if performed
by the father would have accomplished.

751 We venture to attempt an explanation of the last two
854 phenomena as follows: The object that is sought in the fulfillment
of these two traditional customs is to drive away from the child
the presence of the wanurú or the evil spirit of sickness. The
pressure exercised by the father's foot or, lacking this, [66] by
[753] the father's old sandals, symbolizes his presence in the child
[626] precisely in the place where the spirits in order to attain their
evil designs often lodge in the child's body, i. e., its chest, as
we shall have occasion to see in the following chapter. This
symbolic presence of the father prevents the spirits from approach-
ing near the child to work it harm. Lastly, the custom of wrapping
the cinch of [the harness of] the horse on which the father will
be traveling around the body of the child is intimately linked
[825] with the belief of these natives that the horse has the power to
frighten away the wanurú, or spirit of sickness, with its snorting;
more simply this same protection is achieved by placing a
horse's skull in a place near the houses. (Cf. "Amulets, Fetishes,
Talismans." Also, in this case there is a substitution of the magic
formula (using the cinch instead of the horse), a substitution that
has exactly similar effects and the action of which could be
based on one of the laws of magic established by Sir J. G. Frazer

[66 cont.]

751 according to which "things which have once been in contact with
each other continue to act on each other at a distance after the
physical contact has been severed." (45) [Cited in Spanish.]

45. Frazer. La Rama Dorada. [The
Golden Bough], III, 27.

751 There is another medical preventative, also of a magic
nature, taken to avoid infant mortality in Guajiro marriages
after the death of the first-born child. This preventative obliges
[766] them to bury the body in a certain manner. It also imposes upon
the mother a further seclusion, such as she underwent on reaching
puberty (ceremony of initiation), and entails her taking certain
medicines extracted from vegetable roots. If all these prescriptions
are not fully complied with, her future children will die successively
as soon as they are born.

844 Once the child is born, the placenta must be thrown a long way
away from the house and completely lost to sight. If [777] it is buried
it will bring bad luck to the child, who in consequence of such an
imprudence will live a weakling and suffer greatly until his death.

853 When only two or three days after the mother has given
827 birth, her breasts badly swell with severe pains and a lack of
755 milk, her husband must place his foot on her naked breast,
pressing lightly on it, with which treatment the woman will recover.
When a mother loses her milk after a long period of breast feeding
and is no longer able to nourish her child, she must be struck on her
shoulder and her breasts a number of times with the branches of a
plant which is found mainly in the neighborhood of [67] Puerto
Estrella and which on being cut emits a white liquid.

626 The Guajiro takes great care of any of his hair which has
754 been cut off, as he is afraid that it can be used to do him harm.
This fear is based on the belief that if anyone can obtain possession
of a lock of hair, whatever harm he may do to this will react directly
on its owner; if that hair, for example, is thrown on the fire, its
original owner will suffer a similar fate:

[67 cont.]

826 he will die consumed by flames. Likewise, if a lock of human
754 hair is buried with a small quantity of dog excrement, the person
who carries out this act of witchcraft can cause any harm he
wishes to the owner of the hair.

648 Medicine practiced by foreigners. To ensure that his child
757 will be sound and fit and show greater resistance to sickness, the
Guajiro father makes use of the medicine of the Arhuaco, who
like the other natives we know connect this art directly with
magic. It is well to take note, before pursuing this description,
that the Arhuaco are held to be excellent doctors by all their
neighbors, not only by the Indians but also by mestizos and
mulattos, and even by Whites. The fame of these curers is such
that sick people from the neighboring cities of the Sierra Nevada
de Santa Marta and even from Maracaibo have themselves carried
to them to be cured of their illnesses, or, as a last resort, send
them some of their personal articles of underclothing by which the
Arhuaco curer determines the sickness from which the individual
is suffering and sends the necessary medicines.

The Guajiro have not escaped this influence. Their geo-
graphical nearness facilitates communication with the Arhuaco,
but we do not know whether this interchange of relations was
already established before the Conquest or if it is due to the ex-
ternal influence of the colonists who have settled on the slopes
of the Sierra or in regions close to them, who in their turn have
transmitted the legend of the fame of the Arhuaco as doctors to
the Indians of La Guajira.

757 The fact is that generally, shortly before the birth of a
751 child or when some opportunity presents itself, the father goes
278 to the Arhuaco, and from one of them who knows the preventa-
843 tive or curative value of plants he obtains several of these in
order to doctor his child or prevent its sicknesses. Among these
herbs are the vira-vira, quina dulce ["sweet quina"], the
frailejón, and a number of others. These herbs are shredded and
put into a bottle containing rum and to this mixture is added two
kinds of drops, also of plant juices, which have been carefully
[68] "whispered" or "muttered" over by the Arhuaco doctor.
These drops, in addition to the plants to which we have previously

[68 cont.]

757 referred, are what contain the curative properties because of their
751 magic force. These medicines are applied in the following
278 manner: The infusion of herbs with rum and the drops "whis-
843 pered over" are added to previously boiled water, and the child
● is bathed at birth with this mixture. When the mother feels the
pains of approaching childbirth, she also takes a glass of this
mixture and repeats this a few moments after the child is born,
which helps her to get rid of the placenta.

• • •

75 Thus far the notes that we have concerning the magico-
preventative or curative medical methods of the Indians of La
Guajira [sic]. These show first, how medicine, like birth,
sickness, and death, is subject to a series of cultural patterns,
the result of the individual's relations, magic or spiritualistic
(so far as the spirit of the dead is concerned), with his environ-
774 ment. The latter are to be understood in their widest meaning,
since as Doctor W. Born says:

"Primitive man's intellectual world is not really limited to sorcery since there are too many enigmas facing young humanity such as birth and death, dreams and sickness. To explain these, primitive man appeals to various supernatural forces. From experiences in the world of dreams, he derived the belief in a soul as a clear explanation of the consciousness of "ego," which is opposed to the destiny of death. The power of the soul to free itself from its body (as dreams seemed to indicate) accepted, it was natural that he should accept the possibility of the existence of independent and active souls in nature. This state renders feasible not only a polydemonism but also the notion of a material soul. Polydemonism admits that a demon, a sort of soul, lives in everything in nature, while the substance of the soul is an invisible energy which emanates from objects. As the substance

[87 cont.]

858 greater protection than the adult as, owing to his limited defensive capacity, illnesses can readily take possession of his body. We made reference in that section to the malevolent action of certain animals as well as the influence of the dead, the contamination exercised by their spirits on conception and on small children. And now we return to refer especially to this last aspect. We also saw how the harmful effects of animals centered especially on unborn infants due to carelessness on the part of pregnant mothers or of the husbands, and this is repeated equally with regard to funerals.

[767] When the grave destined for a dead person is opened, small children who go to the funeral, relatives of the deceased, must pass in file over it with the object that death will be delayed and will not overcome them while very young.

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[171] When speaking of sacrifice (cf. Chapter III) as well as when speaking of medicine among the Guajiro Indians in its magic aspect, we quoted the general belief in La Guajira, which is known also as an aspect of folklore in various parts of Colombia, among them Santander and Nariño, that if during pregnancy, the father or the mother of the child to be born has been present at the exhumation of any human remains, the child will be born sickly, will suffer from diarrhea, night sweating, paleness, and loss of weight. The characteristic of something touched by death which the corpse has makes it contagious and, so to speak, contaminates the mother of the infant, who because of his weakness is incapable of resisting its influence. If in this case one considers the folklore aspect, the explanation which is given is that the cold of death has affected the child through the person of its mother or its father in the presence of the corpse. The explanation in the case of Guajiro appears to us to be somewhat more complicated, as we had occasion to show above, although the curing processes tend in reality to extract the cold of death from the body of the child after it is born. The method of curing considered infallible by them is to bury the child in the still warm carcass of an animal sacrificed [88] during a wake, and only when there is no such possibility do they make use of the substitute, the bone, or of burying

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[88 cont.]

755 the child in the warm sand, covering it to the base of its head.

752 There is a decided magic intervention, the effect of which we
257 do not know on the part of the sacrificed animal which, as we
have said, shares the contaminating quality of its dead owner.

● 843 Other beliefs which confirm what has been stated are the
845 following: The husband of a pregnant woman should never, for
any motive whatsoever, dig a grave or assist in the construction
of a vault for either a primary or secondary burial ceremony,
because in such a case his wife's delivery will not be normal;
it will be prolonged with danger both to the mother and the child.

Neither should the mother-to-be watch a burial being
placed in a vault because the previously mentioned phenomenon
will be repeated: She will have a difficult delivery, through
delay in the birth and pain.

783 Anyone who has touched a man whose death was not due
753 to natural causes must not come near a sick person because if
764 he does the sick man will quickly die. This also applies to those
who have helped in an exhumation or taken part in any of the
ceremonies called for by the secondary burial. Neither should
such a person go near small children because these will, accord-
ing to Guajiro belief, automatically begin to cry and twist about,
the victims of some sickness.

In general terms, the individual who approaches a corpse,
who touches it, or who participates directly in the different cere-
monies relating to it becomes contaminated. But he does not
suffer the consequences of this contamination in his own person,
unless it be a pregnant woman; he takes on the role of trans-
mitting agent. He becomes an intermediary, if we can so call
him, between the spirit and children, sick people, or pregnant
women, which are the three classes of people preferred by the
spirits of the dead on whom to practice their malevolent con-
taminations. In all three cases the weakness of the contaminated
person is evident: the sick person, the child in the womb unable
to defend itself, and the newborn also incapable of defending
itself against the spirit as it shows in contrast to the other members
of the community, that is, the adults on whom it depends for its

[120 cont.]

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There is another series of magic acts related to those recently enumerated, which also share the qualities of another individual but which differ from them in two aspects: first because they are indirect, that is, because the child receives them through his mother during the period of gestation; second because they are not so directly related with the notion of mana but could be included in what we might call phenomena of auto-suggestion because they only consist of one sudden impression or a strong unsatisfied desire which causes anguish. Some of these are the following.

When a woman is pregnant and she gets a strong shock through the sudden apparition of someone, the child when born will have the same skin color as the person who has startled her.

On the other hand, if during her pregnancy, especially [845] during the early months, the mother should be greatly frightened, twins will be born to her. In this aspect regarding twins, there is also the belief that these are born when the woman has been [853] asked and has refused to give the breast to a twin child whose own mother was unable to feed it.

Finally, when during the time of her pregnancy a woman has a very strong desire to possess something, as for instance a dress, a necklace, any special or particular kind of ornament, and she searches anxiously for it but does not find it and so does not satisfy her wish, her child will be born under the influence of her unfulfilled desire and will carry on its face the dissatisfied look of its mother: He will have his mouth half open, an anxious look, and will be continually crying and upset. [121]

VIII

Magic as the Origin of the Theater in La Guajira (The Dance of the Kid)

128

It may perhaps be overbold to use the title which heads this chapter, and this may even apply to the contents and the statements which we make in it, because here some concepts will be confused which could be treated separately, such as the

and shrieks. Francisco put on a spurt and got there ahead of us; then he turned and called to us:

'Hurry, there's a child being born!'

He pointed to our camera, evidently thinking that that was an event to be filmed.

844 The Indians consider childbirth a natural function that does not need to be hidden. It often takes place in the presence of the entire household, even of children, and if neighbours arrive, they can be present too. Even intimate marital acts take place quite openly, to the amazement and embarrassment of a white person. We thought it best for my wife to go in to the woman in labour, while we sat and talked with the grandfather, who was sitting by himself by the fire. Soon some children came and joined us, having evidently been sent away from the scene of the birth, where something apparently had gone wrong. Now they could look their fill at two white men instead.

[591] The old grandfather was talkative. He told us how the eldest son must always come into the world with the wife's family. There, too, a newly married couple live for the first year. If they are staying elsewhere, the husband takes his wife to her parents' home when the child is expected.

[843] For a long time she will have been taking various decoctions of herbs and observed certain precautionary measures and rules intended to influence the birth favourably. The wife's family is responsible that all will go well. Should the child or mother die, the man has the right to demand damages of his wife's family. On the other hand, said the old man, the second child is born in the father's family, and they must take the risk. Subsequent children can be born in the couple's own home.

843 A pregnant woman must keep away from funerals, graves and anything to do with death, and it is very important [825] that she takes care not to catch sight of a snake. Snakes have a bad influence on parturition. Under no circumstances may a husband kill a snake while his wife is pregnant. A child is a weak, defenceless being and exposed to attack by dangerous spirits. There is an intimate connection between the father and the child, and what the father does is of

INDISCREET INVESTIGATION

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importance. Thus, while the child is on the way, he must not hunt with firearms, but only with bow and arrow. If he goes on a journey of any length after the child has come into the world, he must lay his saddle-girth round the babe or put his foot on its chest before he leaves. If he forgets to do that one can lay a pair of his old sandals on its breast.

If the first-born dies, it is feared that the others will do the same. The baby is placed head down in an urn with a lid and buried beneath a certain kind of tree. The mother often has to undergo another period of confinement, it being thought that all the rules had not been observed during her real period of puberty, and that that had an unfavourable effect on childbirth. If all the instructions are not observed, there is danger that the other children will also die.

My wife came back and told us that the child was born and all had gone well. It was the third child. The woman had lain on her back on the ground with legs straddled, and they had strewn a thick layer of fine sand under her crotch, so that the babe should land softly. An aunt of the woman's helped her, and her husband was there and helped to lift her and hold her during the final pains. The mother was now to keep quiet for a few days and, above all, not expose herself to the sun.

The old man explained that the rich let their women rest for weeks after giving birth, living on maize gruel and light food, while poor mothers have to go out and work as usual straight away. The child has the breast in the evening when the mother goes to bed; at three in the morning when everyone gets up, and occasionally during the day. In the better families the child is weaned with the help of maize gruel and goat's milk and a female slave takes charge of it, the mother having so many other duties. There are even some who keep wet-nurses, he said.

Then more men appeared and a woman who sat behind my wife, just outside the circle. I distributed tobacco and conversation became lively. My wife was surprised that Indian babies were allowed to sit upright so early. She was told that at first the mother supports it with her hand, and

LAWS WITH NO TABLETS

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inherit. They hold him in great respect. A man's chief heir is thus his eldest nephew and he takes particular care of him. During his lifetime a well-to-do man will give his sons enough cattle to ensure that they will not be left destitute when he dies. Each clan has its name and its symbol: the jaguar, rattle-snake, king vulture, dog, etc., but this has no connection with totemism or magic. The Indians think no more of their name's meaning than we do, when people have animal names. They often joke about them. 614
[604]
[428]
[431]

A number of the clans are large and powerful, others small and weak, sometimes entirely dependent on one of the big clans. Those born into a big clan are fortunate, for they have power behind them and can count on support and help if they are insulted, threatened or robbed, for the members of a clan stick together whatever happens, united by the bond of blood. The same blood flows in all their veins. The Indians imagine that the human grows from a drop of the mother's blood, and that the foetus feeds on the new vital fluid—for they know that menstruation ceases during pregnancy. [843]

A man does not possess the right to dispose of his blood or his life. They both belong to the clan. If he hurts himself so that blood flows he must pay damages to his clan for shedding their blood. Suicide is also punishable, though not at all unusual. After an unsuccessful attempt at suicide, the clan will claim damages, even if no blood has been shed. An Indian wanting to take his own life hangs himself. Such importance is attached to the shedding of blood, that, if someone strikes another and makes his nose bleed, this is regarded as an aggravating circumstance and increases the compensation the victim demands. His whole clan will consider itself insulted. In fact, one can really say that an Indian only has the usufruct of his life and blood. [52]
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It is the same with the land. The land in the peninsula is owned by the clans, each of which has its own defined territory. The cultivable areas are not large and lie round the few water-courses that are not dry during most of the year. These plantations are traditionally exploited by certain families in each clan and are inherited by the eldest nephews. 423
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726 on equal terms. He then approached the enemy from the left while making quick movements, jumps, and turns, with his legs apart and his knees bent. More recently, according to Ernst (1887 c), war is not declared, attempts being made to take the enemy by surprise.

[747] Wars last indefinitely, sometimes being broken by a peace brought about by an influential "civilizado" or the Capuchin monks, the latter sometimes paying the retribution demanded out of their own pockets.

579 Some tribes, such as the *Cosina* of Serranía Cosina (actually a conglomeration of outcastes rather than a sib), make their living almost entirely by robbery and pillage, destroying houses, stealing cattle, and killing or enslaving their enemies.

LIFE CYCLE

● 843 **Birth and childhood.**—During pregnancy a woman continues to do her heavy work up to the very hour of delivery. At childbirth, the shaman

844 pronounces various spells over the patient and applies poultices made of
[154] dried flowers, roots, etc. A large, heavy stone placed over the womb and vigorous massaging bring about the birth. If the placenta is not soon expelled, the woman drinks a medicine concocted by the medicine man.

As soon as the child is safely delivered the father serves rum and chicha to all his relatives. If the pains of childbirth appear when the sib is
[484] on the march, the woman mounts and rides ahead so that when the sib catches up the event is practically over. The husband cuts the cord with his machete and cauterizes its ends with a glowing ember. The woman

[854] then continues on the march with the child in a sling on her back. When the permanent camp is reached she washes herself and the child.

851 Baptism is a Christian ceremony which the *Goajiro* have adopted, and
551 most of the Indians are called by Spanish names, as their real names may
177 not be mentioned. Teknonymy is practiced; a parent is addressed by its child's name plus a prefix, nushii or sushi for the father, ni or si for the mother. Thus, a father may be called Nushijuan after a son or Sushi-juana after a daughter.

857 At 6 or 7, girls learn to grind salt, pick cotton, and tend the smaller
868 animals; the boys imitate their fathers.

855 Parents are said to show little affection for their children, sometimes
[335] selling them at Sinamaica. They receive \$10 or \$15 for a child of 8 or 9 years. The purchaser becomes the child's guardian, teaches him the Catholic faith, and keeps him until he is 17 years old. These children

[736] rarely return home. Abandoned children are taken to the San Antonio
797 orphanage, where the girls continue to wear their *Goajiro* dress, but the boys are put into jackets and pants.

881 **Girls' puberty.**—At her first menstruation a girl is isolated in a small dark hut and stripped of all her ornaments. She lies in a hammock, sometimes hoisted near the roof. For the first 2 days she drinks no